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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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SPRING HARVEST IN FULL SWING

All winter long our streams and marshes have lain silent and still under the grip of ice and snow. But with the approach of spring these quiet places are becoming the scene of intense activity. Thousands of trappers are beginning the spring harvest of Canada's $2,500,000 muskrat crop.

Clad in warm clothes and hip boots, the hardy trapper braves the raw winds and cold waters in the early morning to discover what Lady Luck has brought to his trap-line. This is the first step in a chain of events which will result in warm and beautiful coats for my lady of fashion.

The fur of the muskrat is soft and durable and the furrier presents it to the public in many pleasing forms. It is used extensively in its natural, undyed state. One of the most popular processed forms is known as Hudson Seal. A special exhibit at the Royal Ontario Museum shows the various steps by which the long-haired, brown pelt of the muskrat is converted into short-haired, glossy black Hudson Seal. Muskrat is also processed to resemble other furs such as mink, or fur-seal. However, the problems of processing and fashion are for the furrier. They do not concern the busy trapper as he harvests his spring crop, racing, not as the farmer does against the advent of frost and snow, but against the approach of warm weather which renders the pelt of the muskrat unprime and commercially inferior.

LAVA FROM VESUVIUS

An ardent collector cannot be denied, even at the fighting front. Extracts from a letter to the Royal Ontario Museum illustrate the point. Here is what Sgt. Jack Griffith, U.S.A.A.F., had to say,—"Dear Sirs: I have spent many happy hours in your Museum . . . I have made several trips up Mount Vesuvius here in Italy . . . There has been a newly-active fumarole recently discovered about 75 meters from the crater and this contains many interesting minerals, unique on Vesuvius. I am forwarding to your Museum several samples . . ."

"The promise of this letter was fulfilled," states Professor Parsons of the Museum. "Specimens of black glass, white lava, and a reddish porous lava containing exceptionally fine crystals of pyroxene, are now on exhibit."

BLOODSTONE FOR MARCH

At the Royal Ontario Museum we found that heliotrope or bloodstone is an opaque dark-green stone with blood-red spots. It is a variety of quartz which occurs largely in India, Siberia and the Hebrides. Though once commonly cut into charms and amulets, its chief use today is in signet rings.

Centuries ago bloodstone was believed to have very unusual powers,—it could invoke thunder, lightning, rain and tempest, or stop a nose bleed. During the Middle Ages ignorance of the art of gem engraving induced the belief that engraved stones were the work of nature. Bloodstone was sometimes engraved to show the head of Christ and by design the blood-like spots appeared on the brow and face. Thus it acquired a certain religious significance.

AIDS IN WAR OF WORDS

Little is heard of some strategic metals important in war. Antimony is one of these. You will find specimens of this important metal in the collections of the Royal Ontario Museum but they occupy a modest place amidst the myriad of exhibits. Let's briefly tell the story of this somewhat overshadowed metal.

Antimony is very important in the war of words because it is used in making type metal, an alloy with lead and tin. It has the peculiar property of expanding when it solidifies, instead of contracting. This makes it fill the mould completely and the type comes out with the letters full size. Antimony has other unusual properties: It is an antifriction metal in babbit, used in bearings in machines. It is used to make solder and soft alloys, but it is also used to harden lead for bullets and shrapnel. Antimony is important for storage battery plates and it has been used in radios. Britannia metal, resembling pewter and used in cheap tableware, contains tin, antimony and copper.

Canada and the United States produce a little of this metal, mainly from lead-silver ores, but China supplied more than half the world's needs before the war. Mexico and Bolivia are important sources.

MUSEUM TRUSTEE APPOINTED

Robert Fennell, K.C., has recently been appointed to the Board of Trustees of the Royal Ontario Museum by the Provincial Government. Mr. Fennell is head of the law firm of Fennell, Porter and Davis, and this year is President of the Toronto Board of Trade.

SUBURBAN HOUSE, 1375 B.C.

A model of an Egyptian nobleman's house has just been put on exhibition in the Royal Ontario Museum. It is entirely based on houses excavated at Tell el-Amarneh, a short-lived city of the 14th century before Christ. Some of the detail has been supplied by wall paintings of the same period. The model was executed by Miss Sylvia Hahn. Except for the absence of window glass, which was unknown to the ancients, it closely resembles the modern "functional" house. Not only has it a modern appearance, with its flat plain exterior in a charming garden setting, but it is actually as carefully planned for comfort as are the best of modern houses. The kitchens and servants' quarters are in outbuildings. The house itself possesses spacious living rooms and bed rooms for the family. The central living space was well removed from summer heat and winter cold. The north room was used by the family in summer, while on the west side was a sunny winter living room. On hot summer evenings the occupants enjoyed the breeze on the flat roof.

CORNELL STUDENTS VISIT MUSEUM

In order to study the great Chinese Collections in the Royal Ontario Museum a group of six students from Cornell University recently travelled from Ithaca, New York, to Toronto. The party was in charge of Mr. Richard Aldrich of the Cornell Fine Arts Department.